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RHYMING LEGENDS OF IND.

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BY

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THE CITY OF GORE.

THE CITY OF GORE.

THERE's an old ruined site on the Gangetic shore
That for many a year has been called Qoonapore,
Which name is interpreted City of Gore;
And to answer a natural interrogation,
Cropping up t'other day in a chance conversation
As to why it is styled by this strange appellation,
I'm narrating this legend. You'll not be astounded
To hear that it is most assuredly grounded
And founded on truth. But, if any one doubt it,
Come tell me straight out and make no bones about it;
I'll give proof after which you can't possibly scout it.
For what if I shew
You a man that I know
Whose cousin removed four or five times or so
Had married a wife who was closely related

To a pundit by whom it was solemnly stated
On oath—I regret that the statement's not dated,
But my friend he declares he can really remember
It was made in some month such as March or December,
Or possibly May, or may be November—
But o'er dates let us sweep,
For I really must creep
Along faster before I get tangled too deep,
Or else I shall steep
All who read this in sleep;
So let us o'er proof and authorities leap,
And I'll trust that you all without more ado
Will believe that the story I'm telling to you,
From beginning to end's every word of it true.

In the city of Gore
That I spoke of before,
Two brothers there lived in a house with a door,
—A fact that I mention
Not out of convention,
But because doors were then but a novel invention—
The elder was Punchem, the younger was Binda,
And both were as black as a coal or a cinder.
They were Brahmans by caste and, as is the custom

Or was till the British decided to bust 'em
And according to western ideas to adjust 'em,
Lived jointly and shared
What the fates had declared
Was their lot, and uncommonly well they had fared.
They'd of hamlets a score
In their own right, and more
Were mortgaged to them; they'd the house with the door
And walls all of brick
Built terribly thick,
And money they lent,
Though little they spent,
And interest asked at fifty per cent.;
While the neighbours all swore
That if under the floor
You would dig down a foot or perhaps a bit more
You would find of rupees and goldmohurs a crore.
Indeed they were what
For the sake of this plot
I may call an exceedingly prosperous lot.

Now Punchem the elder had married a wife
Who, cross-tempered thing, could not live without strife
And for twenty long years proved the bane of his life;

Yet never a child
On their marriage had smiled,
So Punchem was pretty considerably riled ;
Because, as you know,
If a man cannot shew
A son, he will certainly go down below ;
Old Manu at least has declared it is so.
But at length she conceived
And her husband relieved
By bearing a son ;
Which when she had done,
She obligingly died.
He, he ought to have cried
Or at least for appearance's sake to have tried ;
Yet he did not, he was so uncommonly glad
To be rid of a shrew by becoming a dad.

Punchem's age at this date was fifty and five ;
Not the time, one would think, for affection to thrive
Still, it's certainly true
That before a year flew
In his fossilized miserly bosom there grew
Such a love for his son
That it threatened to run

To dangerous seed
And internally breed
Ideas that subverted
And quite controverted
All principles based on the Manavan creed.
For right now he cared not, he cared not for evil ;
To the skies he might go or might go to the devil ;
As it injured or furthered the cause of his son,
To him good was or bad was whatever was done.

* * * * * * *

On an old charpoy laid
'Neath the wide-spreading shade
Of a peepul tree, later by nigh a decade,
Sat Punchem, but looking by time a bit frayed.
His face was all wrinkled,
With skin strangely crinkled ;
No vigorous flash in his eye longer twinkled,
While was gray of the grave 'mid his raven locks sprinkled,
And his meals, ah poor Punchem !
His gums they must munch 'em,
He hasn't a tooth in his head that can crunch 'em.
Beside on the floor
Sat his brother a score

Of years younger — I don't think I've said that before—

'My brother,' quoth he,

'Come listen to me

'A matter important is on the tapis,

'That's neither a joke, nor yet fiddle-dee.

'Thou hast heard of the saw

'That is writ in the law

'Of Shástra and Ved, that no man has a straw

'Of hope for the future that has not a son ;

'And the fact it is patent, O brother, I've none.

'Five and forty have sped

'Winters over my head

'And up to this day neither woman I've wed,

'Nor ever a word on the subject have said.

'But I'm passing my prime'

—What the dickens will rhyme?—

'I must marry, and quickly while yet there is time

'And I tell thee, my brother, the woman for me

'Is the daughter of Charan, the sweet Danatee ;

''Tis arranged in a month that my bride she shall be.

Then merrily gay

He up and away

Laughing to think of his wedding day.
But Punchem he frowned
And he looked at the ground
And he twiddled and twirled his fingers around ;
And tore at his hair
In cruel despair,
For his brother was strong and the maiden was fair,
And he said, 'They are bound to have children that pair.
'Toiled have I for my son,
'And for him have I done
'Wicked miserly deeds and had mercy on none ;
'I have ground down the poor
'And have turned from the door
'The beggar, the lame, blind, the halt, and, nay more
'Myself lived like a dog. I had hoped for a day
'To dawn when my darling son, what can I say ?
''Mid the great and the grand
'And the lords of the land
'Would the heir of vast wealth on equality stand.
'But, if Binda should marry,
'This scheme must miscarry ;
'He's sure to have children, they're bound to be heirs
'And the property all will be split into shares.
''Tis great wealth for one ; 'tis much even for two ;

'And might make three or four owners all well-to-do.
'But suppose there came more,
'Say six, though not poor,
'Would they ever be heard of outside their own door?
'Not a bit; up the hill
'I have toiled at the mill
'Fifty years, but to bring me a profit of nil.'

Thus dull and confused
He grumbled and mused
And his brother's bride's relatives roundly abused,
Till every bad word in the language he'd used.
What these were I shan't say;
For I fear 'twould not pay;
You would shut up these legends and fling them away.
Suffice it to state that with one exclamation
He consigned the whole lot to eternal damnation.

But Binda he laughed,
With pleasure too daft
To notice his brother's foul envious craft;
And great preparations
He made and bought rations
And gallons of liquor for mighty potations,

And nautches arranged for and sacred libations,
And to great and to small scattered wide invitations,
Till the neighbours all said
They were glad he'd be wed,
For they never had looked on a tastier spread.

Still nothing but brood
And sulkily mood
Did Punchem, bethinking what *had* been the good
Of the toil he had spent;
He must quickly invent
Some plan that more wasting would surely prevent,
And close for the future
With a very firm suture
The hole in the purse that his brother had rent.

And thus pass the days mingling sorrow and glee,
Till there draws in the night
On whose morrow's light
The pomp and the pride of the marriage shall be.

Punchem lay on his bed
With strange thoughts in his head;
He had dreamed that a spirit had whispering said,

'Hark, Brahman, if only thy brother were dead,
'Thy troubles would cease,
'No nephew or niece
'Could share in thy wealth. It would grow and increase,
'And at thy decease
'Undivided, unbroken, and compact in one
'Be left as a legacy all to thy son.'

Then the sprite had levanted
Sure having implanted
Wild ideas in his brain
And set fire to a train
Of thoughts that his brother,
Child born of his mother
And sire, was by him to be secretly slain.
The passion of greed
With the ease of the deed
And the gloom of the night
Dark dimming his sight
Settled down o'er the good of his soul like a blight.
'The fates true have spoken,
'That dream was their token.
'I am sixty and five,

'What good that I live?
'For my boy I have striven,
'Kindred's bonds have I riven,
'Through right and through wrong I have recklessly [driven,
'And now a last gift my own life shall be given.
'That dream was his doom,
'We, sons of one womb,
'Shall murdered and murderer go to the tomb.'
The resolve he had taken
Was not to be shaken;
All thoughts of repentance for ever forsaken,
He crept like a fox
To a room where a box
Brass-studded and fastened with firm iron locks
Loomed dark in a corner; then opened the lid
And drew from the inner recess where 'twas hid
A case that contained
A knife bloody-stained
All the length of its blade;
Ah! How truly it made
With its heavy inlaid and its rich-jewelled hilt
A fit ally to murder and fratricide guilt.
The weapon tight clasped in his fingers he hied
Him away from the box, till he stood at the side

Of the bed where in sleep
All dreamless and deep
Lay his brother. Then lifted the dagger to steep
Its blade in his blood. One bright flash! One wild leap!
He is dead. Not a sound
Save the drip to the ground
Of his blood; darkly staining
Drop by drop it is draining,
Ah, woe! How he bled,
And what terror of red
Is the sight to the brother whose hand the blood shed.

* * * * * * *

While the sky was yet gray
At the dawn of the day
Poor Binda they found still and cold as he lay.
What was to be done? In right goodly array
The guests had assembled. To send them away
Was impossible. No! for a time they must stay.
So they sadly the victuals arranged for the wedding
Consumed, 'twixt the courses a tear or two shedding;
Then equipped for the fray
Said, 'Hang this delay!
'Let us give the assassin the devil to pay.

'Fiend! whatever his name, ugh! he must be a beast
'To have killed the provider of such a fine feast!'
On Punchem they called to be first in the chase,
Crying out, ''Tis your place
'As the nearest of race
'The murderous villain to track and to trace;
'And, but let him be caught,
'He will quickly be taught
'In what way we treat those who don't do as they ought.'

Slow Punchem rose up: 'Come ye, look at this stain!
''Tis his blood on my sleeve. Is there need to explain?
'Look ye then at this knife,
'Its drenched blade sucked his life,
'And I, I in cold blood, not in anger or strife,
'Yes I, his own brother, delivered the blow
'That settled his billet and doomed him to go
'Short-shrifted last night to old shaitan below.
'That's my story; a mask
'Shields my reasons; don't ask,
'But haste, fetch a rope, and be quick to your task
'Of vengeance; yet hear
'Me; by all you hold dear,
'List, I charge that ye burn not my corpse on a bier,

'But bury and wrap first in garments of blue
'All that's left of the wretch who his own brother slew.
'Hark ye this too! I swear with my very last breath
'Ye shall see me again once returning from death.'

In those days were no trials
With intricate files;
No orders of court
And that sort of sport;
No charge was read out, no jury empanelled,
Nor vengeance by codes of procedure entrammelled.
No havildar came from a neighbouring police-station
To do nothing and call it an investigation;
No witness was asked for a truthful narration
Of facts that had birth but in imagination,
Then questioned and bullied and coaxed by vakeels
Till he cannot distinguish his head from his heels;
No! Justice was short and there lay no appeals.

So Punchem was told, if he wanted to pray,
To be quick as the company could not delay
Any longer; 'twas getting too late in the day.
Prayers over, a tree

Was selected and he
Was informed it was time for him ceasing to be.
Round his neck then a noose
Put they, first a bit loose
To see if the rope was well up to such use ;
And on finding it was, o'er a branch the end strung
And pulled it and lo ! Master Punchem was hung.

Later o'er his corse mute
There arose some dispute ;
One said that, although he'd behaved like a brute,
Yet he still was a Brahman, a caste of repute,
And, white his attire,
In a circle of fire
Must be burnt on the top of a faggot-built pyre ;
While others with zest
Cried a dead man's behest
Was sacred and that they must grant his request.
No pundit or rais
On a question so nice
Could judge ; so 'twas settled by tossing a pice,
Which ordered that, as he had asked them to do,
They should bury his body in garments of blue.

* * * * * * *

Years followed on years
And this story of tears
Was forgotten ; the folk who at first had had fears
That, as Punchem had said,
He would rise from the dead
And haunt them, no more felt alarm on that head :
He was buried and bound
Deep under the ground,
A way to the surface could never be found.

The son Rama meanwhile, a tall picture of health,
Now a man, by the aid of his gold and vast wealth,
High in power took his stand
And mixed glove and hand
With the rajahs and princes and great of the land.

Then no custom, I ween,
Had introduced been
That ladies should all be purdah-nisheen ;
And, he still being single,
Mammas would all tingle
As they heard in his pocket the goldmohurs jingle.
Knowing well what a lot
Of ripe daughters they'd got

And, like match-making mothers are now, being not
Prone to throw up the shield
And to others to yield
Such a prize in the matrimonial field,
The old dames fiercely fought
'Mongst themselves and well taught
Their daughters to flirt and behave as they ought
In such case, till at length Master Rama was caught.
Then not wishing to wait,
Promptly as to the date
A pundit he asked who as follows did state :
'Let the moon be born twice,
'The third birth is a nice
'And appropriate time the young couple to splice.'

As thus ordered, 'twas done,
And at dawn of the sun
On the day so decided
A feast was provided
And the bride with her bridegroom those seven step glided
That for happiness, strife,
Unto death, unto life,
Make a couple in Hindustan husband and wife.

To its close then the day
For the company gay
In eating and drinking wore swiftly away,
Till at dusk they adjourned by the light of chirágh
To a tent that was pitched in the midst of a bágh,
There to eagerly watch
That voluptuous nautch
Which is always the end of a Hindu debauch.

The dusky forms dancing,
The flashing and glancing
Of eyes, and the music of motion entrancing
Were—Hark! A cry calling
Of horror appalling,
Half wailing, half shrieking, weird rising and falling;
Now to rattle of bones
By the river it moans,
Now nearer and clearer, still clearer, its tones
Ring out. Buried fears
Lain forgotten for years
Fresh awake into life. Ah! Not new to their ears
Is that voice. 'Tis the sound
Of the dead from the ground;
Of the dead whom they thought buried deep and firm [bound.

Yes, the murderer true to the promise he gave
In the garb of his death has returned from the grave
And just now at night
He's an unpleasant sight;
There's no flesh on his bones and he does not smell quite
So daintily fresh or so sweet as he might.
And his eyes flame as bright
As live fire, and tied tight
Round his neck is a poisonous snake that may bite;
And blood drips and flows
From the tips of his toes
To leave nasty puddles wherever he goes.

As his looks were not recent,
Nor his dress over decent,
Poor Rama, although
'Twas not proper, you know,
Would have very much liked his old father to go,
And really was thinking of telling him so,
When the ghost coming near
Caught him tight by the ear
And cried, 'I have business with you that I fear
'I can't tell you before all this company here.

'Come!' And roughly his son by his bony hand towing
He led him to where tardy Ganges was flowing,
Whispered—p'raps some strange shrive;
Then a struggle, push, dive,
And—they never were seen again dead or alive.

That's the end of my tale, save that here must be stated
The fact that, as none to the dead were related,
Their wealth and possessions were all confiscated,
And the place Qoonapore,
Ne'er inhabited more,
Earned its terrible title of City of Gore.

A MOTHER'S VENGEANCE.

A MOTHER'S VENGEANCE.

A True Story.

I

PERHAPS, reader, you may
Ne'er have found your way
To this Indian clime; so for pardon I pray
If I start this narration
By the trite observation
That in point of repute, morals, character, station,
For centuries past,
Very close to the last
On the list is the place of the grass-cutter caste.
Yet often as haps,
Those oddest of chaps,
Called Fates, in their work to forgetfulness lapse,
And order to sputter
In hovel or gutter,
Existing on crusts that have never known butter
Some maid who would really create quite a flutter
'Mid the beauties of fame,
Had her sire but a name,
Or a million of gold, better now than the same.

II

Thus Motee, sweet pearl,
Was a dear pretty girl,
Who, had she been fair
And stays able to wear
Might have ranked with the first in the swim and the swirl
Of fashion; yet she
Was instead born to be
But a grass-cutter's daughter, a real nobody.
Her father was dead and now she with her brother
Cut grass for support of themselves and their mother.

III

Loose hanging his rein,
Meer Kalab Hussain
Was riding one morning across a wide plain,
When near a well tubbing,
Her shapely limbs rubbing,
Saw he Motee who just had her grass finished grubbing,
And not, save most clean,
Caring e'er to be seen
In ablutions indulging had privately been,

Having never, oh dear,
Had the least bit of fear
That such a spectator was anywhere near.
The tramp of the horse
Quick roused her. Of course
She blushed—but I fear very much that the force
Of this argument quite through her colour was lost
And hardly repaid for the effort it cost—
Then her sheet with a bound
Flung her shoulders around
And shyly pretended to look at the ground,
As if stepped from its frame had some sepia etching
Attractive and sweet and appealingly fetching.

IV

Now Kalab Hussain,
I say it with pain,
Was a villain at heart and a brute in the main;
Of morals he'd none;
As his father had done
Before him, so now like a dutiful son
To the bad he'd set out at the deuce of a run.
And seeing the maid,
So pretty and staid

Coquettishly glancing with eyes half afraid,
Such a very bad thought
As indeed never ought,
And won't when a man has been properly taught,
Came into his mind.
As a species of blind,
He remarked, 'Maiden fair, would you please be so kind
'As a drink to prepare
'And to water my mare,
'While I rest her awhile in that grove over there?'
No fear, as she sped,
Ever entered her head;
The water procuring, as Kalab had said,
She followed him whither the way he had led,
Till the thick hedge they pass
Of the tall jungle grass,
And from view disappear steed and rider and lass.

V

Fore-runner of night,
The last dying light
Of the sun, with its rays gleaming red to the sight,
Sure never was meant

For that crone aged and bent
Who stands at the door of a hut and intent
Scans the road up and down,
Or towards the great town
Looks eagerly, or yet again with a frown
Turns away: 'Why is she
'Late to-night? Can it be
'She has gone unbeknown for a bit of a spree?
'Here's the boy though, hey day!
'Perhaps he can say
'For what reason his sister is stopping away.'

Ram Charan o' the belle
Had nothing to tell;
Having missed her he'd thought her at home. Then low fell
The spirits of both. It was clear that some harm
Had come to the girl. In the wildest alarm
They roused all the neighbours and fetching a light
Searched high and searched low through the spells of the night,
Yet found they no link,
And beginning to think
That perchance she'd eloped, they were just on the brink

Of homeward returning, when told by a lad
That close to the grove I have mentioned he had
Heard shrieks yesterday
And had seen ride away
A man on a horse foaming white with churned spray
So frantic its pace.
They perhaps in that place
Of the poor missing maiden would meet with a trace.

VI.

Dead, stabbed to the heart, with the ground all around her
Dark soaked with red blood, cruel murdered they found her,
Torn clothes, ghastly gashes, grim signs of the strife
Still shewing how brave for her honour and life
She had fought. To the sky
For just vengeance the cry,
'Who did this the death must assuredly die:'
Fierce with anger and loud
Rings out from the crowd.
Like hounds on the scent,
They examine each rent
In her sheet, on the ground each mark and each dent,

In hopes to detect
Some clue to connect
The deed and the doer. They have their reward ;
Broken short in her heart is the point of a sword
And in one hand a remnant of torn cloth yet lingers
Unloosed e'en in death from the clasp of her fingers ;
While, the soil from the rain
Being damp, a long train
Of hoof marks leads forward across the wide plain.

VII.

Look, swift on this trail
They rush, a bit pale
— Or rather, light-brown—in alarm lest it fail,
For the horse might have taken some road or hard ground,
Where no signs of his galloping strides would be found.
Yet they need not have faired out their dusky complexions ;
A course of long winding and devious flexions
Formed of proofs a firm chain
That the rider drew rein
At the door of the zemindar Kalab Hussain.

Not deeming it right

To be over-polite

In such duty, but rather at once to grip tight

This dastardly fiend and degenerate mortal,

Without more ado they prompt splintered his portal ;

And out dragged him swords bared,

And the links all compared;

A most deadly comparison, list how he fared !

The prints on the path they'd so faithfully followed

Were the tracks of his mare, by her hoofs they'd been hollowed

And fitted all round,

While the steel from the wound

Was the point of his sword which short-broken they found;

And the cloth from the clutch of the woman he'd wronged

To a coat unearthed deep in a closet belonged ;

While still to it cleave

Fatal marks; on the sleeve

Is a deluge of blood. He would have them believe

That the stains are from wounds on his face where red patches

Add but further proof; clear 'tis shewn by those scratches

That, when naught else avails
And all human help fails,
A woman hard-pressed can spill blood with her nails.
But the clincher adduced
Was the lad they produced
Whose original statement it was had conduced
To the search in the grove;
By the powers up above,
And as true Mussulmán
On the sacred Korán,
He swore without feign
That he'd seen on the plain
The man now before him, Shaikh Kalab Hussain.

VIII.

'Twas enough! To the gate
Of the judge of the state
They hurried him off. He, it now being late,
Keeping Kalab in lock-up appointed a date
To decide on the murderer's guilt and his fate.

IX.

And here 'tis as well
My hearers to tell

That a custom exists
In that state and resists
All changes. To do what the nearest one lists
With, a murderer ta'en
And found on arraign
To be guilty belongs to the kin of the slain,
Who themselves or by hand
Of some slave they command
May chop off his head, or instead his brow brand
With red iron, or fee
Take of dwindling rupee
As price of his life and inform him he's free.

X.

On the day of the trial the public delighted,
Attracted by such chaste amusement, excited
Streamed into the hall where poor justice when slighted
And appealing for help would get now and then righted.
The aged diwán
With his attar and pán
Beside him, in front an old dog-eared Korán,
On a rich velvet carpet spread out on a daïs,
Solemn tailor-wise sits, as the Indian way is.

Down lower there smiles
A munshi with files
And papers all round him, old records and piles
Of cases decided or under remand
Or pending the issue of final command.
To the left guards restrain
With a stout iron chain
Fixed to ankles and wrists Master Kalab Hussain ;
And behind a low rail crowds that motley collection
Of people who, having no sort of connection
With a case, yet evince aye a grim predilection
For all moral slime
And time after time
Throng the courts faint with horrible hunger for crime.

XI.

Hark! An ugly vakeel with the usual volution
Of figure has opened the crown prosecution
By an ununderstandable speech in high Persian
—A lingo for which I've the greatest aversion—
And has started to state
And diffusely relate
That at such and such place, and on such and such date,
By the order and rule of inscrutable fate,

A deed of spilt gore
That they all must deplore
Was committed; and so, now in whisper, now roar,
He tells them the story I've told you before.
Then the witnesses came; they were such a procession
And on Kalab their statements so wrought deep impression,
He collapsed and recorded a solemn confession
Of guilt in the hope and the groundless belief,
That thereby from the court he might gain some relief,
And mercy. But no!
It was not to be so;
They condemned him and, as I have mentioned, you know,
To custom bent knee
And passed a decree
That at mercy of mother and brother should be
The foul murderer's life, to exact or set free;
Nor it being their way
To admit of delay
In such cases, 'twas settled that on the seventh day
They both must appear
And let the court hear
Whether they had decided to let him go clear;

Or again, if a jot
Of mercy they'd not,
Ram Charan must cut off his head on the spot.

XII.

Meer Kalab Hussain having lacs of rupees
Thought to buy himself off with the greatest of ease,
For miserably poor
And with poverty sore
Was the widow, the wolf never leaving her door.
So a man sent he gay
With a promise to pay
A thousand of dibs at the dawn of the day
His master found freedom. Ram Charan was willing;
Though a dib be but worth ha'pence eight and a shilling,
It was better than nought, and he'd no taste for spilling,
Though he was the dead's brother,
The blood of another
E'en for sake of revenge. But how different the mother!
She shrill crieth out, high uplifting her hands,
'By Brahma creator, the god of all lands,
'By the Ganges so clear,

'By the Rákshas I fear,

'By all that in heaven or earth I hold dear,

'Hark, son, to this oath that I solemnly swear;

'No food shalt thou eat, no cloth shalt thou wear,

'That is bought by *her* blood money. Sharpen thy knife!

'It is death for a death, it is life for a life!'

XIII.

The servant he sped

To his master and said,

'I fear it won't work. She has got in her head

'A fixed resolution to have your blood shed.'

'But, that's bosh,' he replied,

'My release they've denied

'Through covetous greed.

'Of course I'll be freed;

'It's money, not blood, that they wish me to bleed.

'She wants gold, the old flint;

'Go, fetch from the mint

'A thousand bright mohurs and see if their glint

'Doesn't settle this rot!

'Curse! A thousand's a lot

'For the hag, and I bet she'll be glad to have got

'Such a price, and go quick,
'I am getting o'er sick
'Of this chain on my wrists. It's confoundedly thick.'
The instructions correct
Were performed—with effect
The same as before ; grimly plain and direct
Quoth the widow, 'Have done !
'By the hand of my son
'He dies. Come not more, for of hope there is none.'
Thus passed seven days, each morning a proffer,
First thousands, then lacs ; she refused every offer.

XIV.

Near the town's northern bound
A grass covered mound,
Forty feet or so high 'bove the country around,
Oft a Tyburn had been,
And here the last scene
Of this legend is laid. Block, and axe deadly keen
Lie ready ; and now Shaikh Kalab Hussain,
Cruel murderer stamped with the signet of Cain,
Kneels beside it. With face paled the colour of ashes
He turns towards the east where the first gleaming flashes

Of dawn light the sky ;

Then utters a cry,

'All I have, all the gold, all the riches that I

'Have gathered, my home, all the broad lands that lie

'Wide around it, I give ! But, oh, let me not die !'

Look ! The son makes a step ; but no ! Wild like a call

From the clouds rings the voice of the mother, 'If all

'The wealth and the riches of earth were now proffered,

'Think not I would touch them ! No gold ever coffered

'Shall pay for the guilt

'Of the blood thou hast spilt

'Or the honour thou blackenedst. Hark, dog thou wilt

'Fall dead at one stroke ; but nay, had *I* my will,

'Not so sudden thou'dst die. Ha ! By inches I'd kill

'Thee, fiend ! And the thrill

'Of torture should still

'In death nerves and limbs that had suffered the fill

'Of a mother's revenge. Now strike ! Let him die,

'And his corpse as a meal for the pariahs lie !'

XV.

The son, as she ceased, swings his axe round his head,
And with one fatal blow fells the murderer dead ;
Then spurning the clay
Strides sullen away
As he mutters that this sort of deed does not pay,.
And that *he* has not seen
How much profit there's been
Derived from his mother's old-womanish spleen.
Ugh ! To think how there lay
Wealth untold in his way,
Yet a drudge still to live at one anna a day !

XVI.

That's all ! Now, I'll bide ;
Please, hearers, decide .
For yourselves what my moral should be ; whether pride
And stern vengeance be done ;
Or whether you run
In the other direction and join with the son
In saying that, though blood is good, yet it's clear
When it costs you a fortune 'tis bought much too dear.

THE BLUE COW.

A True Story.

THE BLUE COW.

A True Story.

It was Lieutenant Antonio Jones
That shouted these orders in autocrat's tones,
'Quihye! Where's Ameer?
'Ah, confound you, come here!
'Is it true this I've heard that a species of deer
'They call neelgae is found in the jungle quite near?
'Give me khubber at once, sir, if any appear.
'They are good for the pot
'And I must have a shot,
'For about them they tell me of stories a lot;
'That they're funny of gait
'With an odd-looking pate,
'And strange in their colour and shape; that they wait
'While your hunters draw near
'And never a fear
'At the sight will display, but most stolidly peer
'In their faces. It *is* most uncommonly queer
'That I'm sportsman so green
'As to never have seen

'These animals yet ; for this should not have been
'And at all events shan't be much longer, I ween.
'Let one but heave in sight,
'Be it day, be it night,
'I awake or asleep,
'At my leisure, or deep
'In some case at cutcherry, come, silently creep
'And speak. I'll have done,
'And hold ready my gun,
'So that I can set off straight away at a run ;
'Just you see if I don't stretch for dead at least one.'

Tony Jones first saw fence
In Calcutta and thence
A transfer preferred to employ where the pence
Came with more expedition.
To get an addition
Of income substantial, to join Oudh's Commission
As assistant he chose and now helped to detect
And to punish all crime ; and moreover collect
Each due by its day,
Shewing natives the way
Like dutiful children their taxes to pay
And not ask how they're spent ;

For wherever they went
It was clear a beneficent government meant
All for good—But, p'raps, sir,
Here I wander and err
From my subject a trifle. I'm sure you'd prefer
That I be not so bold—
Well, then 'twas the cold [told,
Weather season, the time, as perchance, you've been
When collectors 'neath tree
A-camping *may* be
On tours of inspection their districts to see,
——The *may* is for Oudh and the N.-W.-P.
In Bengal there's disgust,
That a chief zubberdust,
Id est with more strength in his arm than his crust,
Once altered the wording of *may* into *must;*
And for useless obsession
Of men of discretion
Framed rules so minute that they'd look like oppression
If meant but for school-boys; but that's a digression;
He'd his reasons, I trow;
That province, you know,
Is *Lower* Bengal, can it be that in tow
To keep with that name he made laws that are low?—

So Antonio Jones was on tour, and a very
Good time he was having, with little cutcherry
And plenty of sport,
Duck, snipe, every sort
Of shooting on land and in water ; in short
Quite complete was the dance
Now that found was the chance
Of a neelgae. His rifle at taking a glance
Lest it should not have been
Made properly clean
He adjourned to his duties and might have been seen
Later on in his court-tent behind a camp-table
Recording the mixture of fact and of fable
In India called evidence ; which you are able
To buy, as 'twere rice
By the pound, at a price
That ranges from mohurs to annas and pice.
He was jogging along just as fast as his knowledge
Of Urdu—'tain't taught at the Royal M. College—
Would admit, 'cross the span
Of a case where a man
Had eloped with the wife of his neighbour. One can
Do such things with impunity here, and we scan,
With delight and not care,

Such stories ; but there,

No, they're brown and idolaters ; 'twould not be fair

Them go wrong we should let,

So they punishment get

For a deed that no Christian has ever done yet,

—Except by mistake, when he liked it, you bet.—

At the stage of the strife

Where the reprobate wife

Was declaring on oath that ne'er yet in her life

Had she done a deed gay.

And here I may say

That a Hindu to perjury's born in a way,

Yet a lie he can't tell

One-tenth fraction as well

As in London your co-respondent and swell,

At the court in the Strand

With a Bible in hand

Before God and the judge and the jury will stand

And, though every one know

That 'tis false, swear a crow

Is white. In idolatrous Ind 'tisn't so ;

They may perjure, as here,

And they do ; but the peer,
Out there has the court of the country to fear.

To this point he had crept
When behind him there stepped
That morning's chaprassi with khubber. He swept
One glance round the court and then sternly demanded
Why the case under trial should not be remanded
For an hour or so. None
Said a word. So 'twas done,
And the court was adjourned and the judge with his gun
And cartridges started for neelgaes and fun.

Though rather short-sighted, Jones always derided
The adoption of specs and himself a bit prided
On the way that he shot ;
And could he but spot
The game and attain a fair range, say he got
Within yards twenty-nine
With full time to recline,
À la Bisley adjusting his sights in a line,
Then occasional bullets would kill, I opine.

And, perchance if the same
Did go wide, why the blame
It could *not* have been his, for he knew that his aim
Was correct and should out of perversity game
The moment he fired take a jump or call halt,
Sure of marked, not of marksman, the miss was the fault.

Soon shew him did they
Where, not far away
By the side of the jungle, some patches there lay
Of overgrown glade,
Where for love of the shade
At present the neelgaes their dwelling had made.
'What! Beside yonder tree?
'Oh yes, good! I can see
'The place right enough. You then wait here for me,
'For alone I will learn
'What they're like, and return
'To decide in that case I was forced to adjourn.
'I'll but fire and then clear;
'So as soon as you hear
'A shot, hurry up there and fetch back the deer.'
This said, on the tack

Of the rough-broken track
He departed and shortly the whistling crack
Of a rifle rang out and the judge toddled back.
On his face smiles abound,
For the neelgaes he's found
And the lord of the herd he has brought to the ground.

* * * * * * *

Not far from the village in which, as I've stated,
Our hero, young Jones, and his tents were located,
Old Smith was encamped who, as head of the station,
To Jones had sent out a polite invitation
Through which on that date
In the evening at eight
They were dining together. By way of a bait
To get them to ask him the tale to relate.
Of the deer he'd left dead,
He casually said,
'By the way, Mr. Smith, I have potted a head
'Of neelgae.' 'Ah! Jones!
'How was that?' rather groans
His host, and he'd cause for such dolorous tones;
Neelgae, as know you,
Means a cow that is blue
And, though as a matter of fact it is true

They are deer and not cows, yet an average Hindu
Much objects to their slaughter and officers too,
Though Paget, M. P.,
Mayn't think so, yet see
That the feelings of natives o'er-ridden shan't be.

But Jones was too keen
On having it seen
What an excellent sportsman and shot he had been,
To have noticed Smith's manner.
'I will wager a tanner
'Such a very fine beast, such an out and out spanner
'Is not shot every day,
'It was just in this way;
'When khubber was brought that a herd of them lay
'Near the jungle, I started at once for the fray.
'Well, you know how a servant will stumble on stubble
'And frighten the darlings and always give trouble;
'So I just got the ground pointed out from a distance
'And went there alone and dispensed with assistance.
'Near a glade lay a pool
'That it seemed a safe rule
'To think, when the evening or morning was cool,
'They'd frequent for a drink. There I sat in position

'A hundred yards off till my aching condition
'Near made me aghast
'Give up; when at last
'A most curious beast at a pace hardly fast
'Right into the water trots lumbering past.
'Very strange in its shape
''Twas blue-black from the nape
'Of its neck to its hoofs and it stared with a gape
'That shewed nothing of fear.
'I can't see very clear
'From a distance, but still a most odd sort of deer
'That neelgae did look. I had heard they were queer,
'Or I should much have doubted—but that's neither here
'Nor there—well, 'twas not
'A bad range and I got
'A good bead and despatched him the very first shot.'

Hush! What's that noise? Why!
It's 'Dohai, sahib, dohai!'
Which you know for redress is the Indian cry;
Look too! Stern as a saint
Comes a man to acquaint
Old Smith that a native has brought a complaint

Against—Mr. Jones! 'This is odd, Jones, let's see,'
Remarked Mr. Smith, 'what the matter can be.
'Call the man.' All mud-smears
A native appears
And perched on one leg weeping crocodile's tears
Says, trying to look overcome by his fears
'Bhagwán, as I trow,
'Is above and below,
(By which he meant earth and not lower, you know)
'Is my father and mother in one, you who give
'To this child the subsistence by which he can live,
'If you hear me, I'm heard. If you don't, then I'm not;
'Sir, the sahib besides you, who thinks he has got
'A neelgae, has only my *buffalo* shot;'
'Ha! Ha! Jones, well done!
'That's what fell to your gun!
'Hum! Your story seemed like it. Now, pay for your fun
'And let's send him away.' 'But indeed, it was none
'Of my doing, I shot—'
'Yes of course, and you got
'A buffalo; well, this won't soon be forgot!'
Jones proceeded to pay;

But still to this day,
Though now he's a full-blown collector, you may
See an unspoken sigh
In Antonio's eye,
If only you breathe in a whisper *neelgae*.

FAMINE.

FAMINE.

THERE is woe in the land
From the surf-beaten strand
To the mountains that tower in the north ; for the hand
Of the grim-visaged fiend of dread famine has spanned
The arc of the heavens, and black is its shade
O'er thick-peopled village, o'er wild jungle glade
In the world of the Ganges. The streams of the sky
Twenty months have been dry
And the heart-stricken cry
Of men, who, if get they not water, must die
Never drops into silence. Stark, gloomy with death
Roams the spirit of pestilence breathing that breath
That blasts all it touches. Great towns that once rang
With the bustle of life are now hushed and the clang
Born of commerce is stilled. Broad the country aye green
With rich fruit of the earth gasps dry-parched 'neath the keen

Scathing fire from the west. Stout men who have been

As great giants in strength totter wasted and lean

Like the shivering shadows. Young children with skin

Wrinkled close o'er their bones scarce can lift on their thin

Nerveless necks their aged faces. The oxen and kine

And the horses are dead. E'en the village-dog's whine

Never breaks on the sorrow of night. Wells are dry

Left to crumble neglected ; the very tanks lie

But festering beds of disease. Sad the cry

May rise from a people that looks on the sods

Of daily-dug graves, ' 'Tis the wrath of the gods.'

Brahmanical priests, mysterious seers

Of the great sacred shrines, weary-worn with dire fears

Lest horrors more horrid shall come, aye adoring

With penances ever more cruel, are poring

O'er shastra and precept ; they toil to discover

How came this dark shadow of famine to hover

O'er fair Hindustan, and from whence is the spell

That abroad midst the people of Ind wreaketh fell

Destruction unceasing, and drieth the rain
In the cisterns of heaven ; yet search they in vain.

* * * * * * * * * * *

You all of you know that to Hindus the giver
Of whatever is good and worth having's a river,
Ganges' holy stream, and
Of the cities that stand
On its banks as it tardily flows through the land,
The most sacred's Benares which, were it not dirty
As only Benares can be, with its thirty,
Or thirty times three,
Of temples would be
A magnificient sight for a stranger to see.
As things are, wisest is it to keep at a distance,
Unless you perchance are in want of assistance
To learn where death leads ;
If so, cholera seeds
Are supplied there unasked for, of various breeds
Which will kill, as you seek,
In an hour or a week,
At ranges to suit any suicide's freak.

However, that's here
Not the point. In the year

Of the famine none out of the priests was so near
To becoming an angel—in soul, not in looks—
As Máhánandgeer. He had read all the books
That there were to devour ;
He could spout by the hour
From Rámáyan and Manavashástra, the flower
Of Sanscrit. To beg
He had stood on one leg
All his life till it came to resemble a peg
Of oiled black-thorn. And there !
Well, as to his hair,
'Twas so dirty and long and he'd taken such care
Aye to soak it with paint
That never to faint
'Neath such a foul mop was sure sign of a saint.

Folk a proverb repeat
That extremes ever meet ;
Still this hardly provideth a bait so complete
As your Hindu to lure
To consider he's sure
To render his soul more pious and pure
By taking no care
Of his body and hair

Till they get to condition that really I dare
Not put on these scenes.
Yet these are the means
They adopt, and our friend since he entered his teens
Had refused to engage
In a wash. Thus, his age
Being now nearly ninety, he'd grown such a sage
With a spirit so holy that history's page
Not his equal can spell.
All asked him to tell
Why the gods were so angry and why their wrath fell
Unappeased and relentless on Ind. Standing perched
On his peg of a leg every book he had searched
Till his eyes were half blind,
Yet for all could not find
One passage that suited a case of this kind.

He was getting distrusted,
Worn out and disgusted,
Had begun to declare to himself he'd be *busted*
If they all would not deem
That no seer did he seem,
But only a humbug ; when, lo, he'd a dream !

His leg was quite well;
Dancing up a long dell
Delicious and shady
A sweet little lady
Resembling most nearly gay Don Juan's Haidée,
—Except that I'll grant
That, although they were scant,
She wore a few garments; while 'twould be but cant
To declare that this damsel had any; however
She was only a dream and all air, so that never
Of her could be said
Any scandal—she led
Great Máhánandgeer up the gorge by the bed
Of a bit of a thing
Of a brook, a mere string
Scarce a yard right across, till she came to a spring
From a rock-fissure shed;
Then turning her head,
'Tis the source of thy Ganges,' half-laughingly said.
He looked and, alack!
Saw a terrible crack
In the cliff, whence came winding a water-worn track
Whose depth and whose beam
Were so great, it would seem

At one time in it flowed had a vast rushing stream.
But now, as I've said,
Running there in its bed
'Twas reduced to the veriest skimp of a thread.

Old Máhánandgeer,
Like a sensible seer,
Most promptly remarked, 'There is something wrong here,'
'And there's foul play at work in that crack there, I fear.
''Tis a mystery rum
'What can have become
'Of the water, Miss ; look ye, the gallons, by gum,
'That were passing here once made a tidy big sum.
'Quite correct, Master Tow-
'On-the-head, come, I'll shew
'What is wrong with the water-works stopping their flow.
'I will wager you'll say 'tis a very odd go.'
'Shew me then, as you say,'
He replied ; but so gay
Scarce would he have spoken, known had he the way
To the rise of the rill,
For it skirted the hill

So jagged and narrow it needed much skill
E'en to crawl along safely and not get a spill.
So that, what with her teasing,
And bad fits of sneezing
For he felt a bit cold, it was only by freezing
With his fingers and nose
And his teeth and his toes
To the cliff, that he finished this journey of woes,
And enjoyed a few seconds of well-earned repose.
'Come along! 'Tis enough
'That you've rested. It's snuff
'I shall get, if I dawdle much longer, old bluff.
'Stretch your razor-boned shins,
'And get on to your pins;
'And make haste to that cave
'Over there, and, mind, save
'All the courage you've got for the sight,' and she gave
Quite the last thing, the minx!
That a man ever thinks
That a spirit will give, the demurest of winks.
With a smile on his face
The grave sage at a pace
Slowish, still 'twas the best he could summon, gave chase
To the damsel who'd winked at a saint in such place.

But when he drew near
To the cave, a great fear
Came over his soul, and he said, 'Pretty dear,
'Do tell me, I pray, what I'll meet with in here.'
'I can't say, sir,' said she,
'Will you please go and see
'For yourself?' again winking as if 'twas a spree.

Less frightened, inside
He stepped and espied
Such sight that, if saint he were not, he'd have died.
From a gulf none could sound
As it yawned in the ground
Stretched the head of a crocodile which I'll be bound
—That is, if you rule a conjecture's admissible,
For only the head of the creature was visible—
Was a hundred leagues long
From the tip of his tongue
To the end of his tail; may be, I am wrong
By a yard or a mile e'en, but that's a mere song;
And his jaws gaped so wide
As the pundit he spied
And so loudly, as if sadly hungry, he sighed,
That Máhánandgeer

Grew death-cold with fear
And was going to quit, when the nude little dear
To his side quickly passed
And cried, 'Not so fast,
'Master what-you-may-call'em, you're not at the last
'Of this business just yet ;
'But, my gracious, don't fret,
'He does not eat ninety-year olds, that I'll bet.
'Still some young flesh he does want, and till he can get
'As a meal for a treat
'Your fairest to eat,
'The rains in your plains will enjoy a back seat,
'Here's the case in a bud,
'You old stick-in-the-mud ;
'If only you'll give him a drink of fresh blood
'He will sleep for a century. *But*, if you let him
'Get thirsty, why then, as this year, you will get him
'A-taking great pains
'To tipple at rains
'In a way that spreads famine all over your plains.
'Now, mark what I say ;
'You will find it will pay,
'If the fairest young maid of your city you slay
'And mingle her blood with the Ganges. Next day

'It will rain and not roast.

'List, I am the ghost

'Of the last girl he had and I'm sent to play host

'To the next. Now, I wis

'That I'm off; but take this

'As a little memento.' What was it? a kiss!

Puff! Gone like a flash is the sprite and dawn breaking

Finds Máhánandgeer, his lame leg cured, awaking.

With a hop, skip, and pelt

Just to shew how he felt,

The seer scurried along to his shrine helter-skelt,

And hailing a pupil

Cried all cock-a-hoop: 'Ill

'Last night my leg lay; but see it to-day,

''Tis as right as a trivet. Now, haste you away

'And call the high priests and the pundits together

'I've news that will put the whole lot in fine feather.'

An hour later all,

Both the great and the small

Were assembled, at first they declared he spoke tall

And for proof would fain beg;

But on seeing his leg
Were convinced 'twas a cup from the froth to the dreg
All a bumper of truth, and at once they resolved
That, although 'twas a matter much pain that involved,
Ere the dusk of the night
Should have quenched the last light
Of the sunset, they'd remedy Hindustan's plight,
And assuredly kill
Their fairest to fill
The maw of the blood-drinking beast on the hill.
But who was their fairest? No difficult question
In days when there'd hitherto been no suggestion
Of keeping the women-folk curtained and curled
In zenanas. Of course, the sweet *Light of the World*
Nur Jehán of Benares, the rajah's famed daughter,
Had no equal in beauty. 'Twas she for the slaughter
Was destined by fate.
They haste to the gate
Of the palace and enter the hall where in state
The rajah was sitting
And, as is befitting
To one of his rank, was two cockerels pitting
'Gainst each other in fight.
Much surprised at the sight

Of the pundits, nor quite overcome with delight,
He demanded what hail,
And they told him their tale.
He heard it in silence, but shrunk and grew pale
At their words. A reply
That it all was a lie
Half hung on his lips. But e'en he could not try,
Though a rajah, to prove a leg crooked his eye
Plain told him was straight,
Groaning out, 'Fate, 'tis fate,'
He bade fetch his daughter. Like women, her rate
Of dressing was slow, so she came rather late.

And, oh sad was her welcome and doom was her cheer
As they told her the vision of Máhánandgeer ;
Yet not one single tear
Did she shed, and I hear
Shewed never a tremble or trace of a fear,
But cried she was willing to go to that dear
Little dame of the stream,
Who out of a dream
Had bidden her die for the millions that teem
Through her land. Forth as went she, her sire angry hissed

'Twixt his teeth : ' 'Tis *my* sorrow now, Brahmans ; but list,

'If it rain not to-morrow, 'tis *you'll* need *my* pity ;

'I'll not leave one pundit alive in this city.'

'The gods' will we have learned,'

Said the priests and adjourned,

And at sunset went down to the Ganges and turned

The girl's face to the west. There she stood on the bank,

In her eyes the last gleam of the sun ere he sank

Into darkness of night. Bending lowly she prayed

To the gods that she worshipped ; then bare her neck laid

To the steel of the seer and unflinchingly bade

Him strike and be done.

As she died, o'er the sun

Swept a mist as of cloud,

And that night long and loud

Rolled the roar of the thunder, and heaven low bowed

To the fields so long thirsty dispelling the dearth

That had brooded dark months o'er the face of the earth.

For the spell of the draught of the blood had worked deep,

And the crocodile 'neath his great hills was asleep.

A TERRIBLE TIGER.

A True Story.

A TERRIBLE TIGER.

A True Story.

WHEN the rail at full tilt
Was just being built
Some years now ago, to the city of Nilt
My way I did wend
And it chanced that a friend
John Brown engineer from his work on a bend
Of the line three miles off sent a billet inviting
Me over to dinner that evening and citing
A barrel of beer
That had just come out clear
From England as quite irresistible cheer ;
While a postscript annexed to the end of his letter
Informed me that, if I *did* come, I had better
Set out before sunset, unless I'd a humour
Not to dine, but he dined off. He *had* heard a rumour
That a beast of a toad
Of a tiger abode
In a dense piece of jungle through which lay the road
By which I must ride.

Of course I replied
That I must have a sip of that beer if I died,
And wrote with a wink
It was foolish to think
That a planter'd be late when in search of a drink.

Yet through being too deep
In work, or perhaps sleep,
Or through some other cause I've forgotten to keep
In my records of blame,
By the time the hour came
And my mare was brought round to the door, I with shame
Have to own it was dark
And right eery the bark
Of the jackals rang out and of light was no spark
In the path I'd to pass.
'Hang it all! I'm an ass
'To have dawdled so long! Hi, there! Fetch me a glass
'Of soda and whisky,
'Nothing makes me so frisky.
'By Jove, but with tigers about, it *is* risky!
'Well here goes!' Off I sheer;
The path lay quite clear

For the first quarter mile, but I felt a bit queer
And my courage grew slack
As I entered the track
Through the wild jungle belt, just then looming so black
That a furlong decided me ; I would turn back ;

When—a rustle and smash
Of the twigs and a crash
Through a bush close behind me, a leap and the flash
Of a beast through the air
Were too much for my mare ;
She was off like the lightning ; and didn't I share
Her fears, as I heard
—O ye saints, how I spurred
Her Bootia sides, though you know 'tis absurd
To expect to get speed
From a nag of that breed—
Sounds whence I inferred that I really was treed !

The soft pattering of feet
On the leaves followed fleet ;
Growing nearer and nearer 'twas hardly a treat
To my ear.
I'd a fear

That unless to the rear

It fell and the rest of my journey left clear

Never, never a drop would I taste of that beer.

Pit-a-pat! Pit-a-pat!

Crash! There goes my hat

'Gainst a branch; let it go then, I can't stop for that;

Lucky I'm not without

My head! 'There, swing out,

'Old lady, swing longer! I'll make the blood spout

'With my spurs if you don't. Ah! Well done! Now you're going;

'Keep it up like a dear! Don't you see the lights glowing

'Right ahead? Shew your stamp;

'That's the camp! That's the camp!

'Keep it up, keep it up! Tigers funk at a lamp;

'If you get to a fire,

'You'll be free of the mire;

'Come along, do you hear! Oh, you beast! If you tire,

'We are both at death's door!

'Come! A hundred yards more!

'Now fifty! well done! we are safe; I was sure

'You would do it!—And where

'Is stripes?' Turned I; there,

Just as I'd expected, afraid of the glare
Stood, what? (You may chaff,
And I'll join in your laugh)
Not a tiger, but only a—*Brahmani calf!*

THE LEGEND OF SOMNATH.

THE LEGEND OF SOMNATH.

A LONG time ago ;
I'm afraid I don't know
The date quite exact; where the country, with snow
Is white, without knack
Of turning to black
In that land that of chimneys has never a stack,
In Ghazni 'mid keen
North winds and ice sheen
Reigned Mahmúd, whose father, old Subuktigeen,
(Name, like man, rather hard to get over) had been
The first Islamite king
To have a good fling
At robbing the Hindus ; a bad wicked thing,
Which if one should do now, why, of course, he would swing.

Like father, like son !
As the sire had begun,
So followed the chip of his block and much fun
He enjoyed in his way.

Don't you see? In that day
Things were managed more roughly than now; they'd [not say
They were fighting some debt of hurt honour to pay;
Nor would shout with elation
As they made preparation
For war, that 'twas only a peace celebration.
No! They were not afraid
Then a spade to call spade
And as for a raid, robbers! why, if they made it
They blushed not one whit, but admitted they raided.
Though, even they, just as five hundred years later
Religionists did at my own *alma mater*,
Held—'tis worse than a tertian—
The horrid assertion
That force can conduce to a spirit's conversion;
A dogma whose beauty
Taught Mahmúd his duty
Was to purify Hindus by pocketing booty,
And so he took tours
On the Indian moors
To try what impression his Islamite cures
On idolators made.
When he could not persuade
Them to think that they had been most amply repaid

For the loss of their gold
By having been told
That the idols they offered it to were too old
To have power for aught good,
They were left not to mood,
But were killed and their corpses were jungle dogs' food.

But too far we have wandered. Let's back to the path
Of my legend and list to the tale of Somnath.

When from home he had strayed
And thrice five times had made
What some call a mission and others a raid,
Mahmúd to the west
Returned for a rest
And scattered and spent with the greatest of zest
All the gold that was stored in his treasury chest.
But the money ran low,
As it will do, you know,
E'en with people who've got a big bank-book to shew,
If outward, ne'er inward, continues the flow ;
So it struck him he'd dawdled too long at diversion,
While he should have been preaching and pushing conversion.

A council of state
He called and did rate
Them as follows: 'Ye pillars of earth, I am *bate*
'If the question's not moot
'Of no money. The loot
'Of Thaneshwar is gone. How we gave them the boot,
'The heathens, that day! And justdidn't they scoot!
'But now dry's the can,
'So, Master Dewan,
'You'll be hung this same night, an you find not a plan
'To replenish it quick;
''Tis no difficult trick,
'And once done, as you know, I'll behave like a brick;
'So cudgel your brain!
'While I try if the pain
'Of a thumbscrew put on you to wear and a chain
'Cannot help your ideas 'long the line of my gain.'

The dewan who'd expected as much from the steady
Expenditure with a reply was quite ready;
'As your Highness is kind,
'So this slave in his mind
'Some device of financial reform will sure find.
'And, am I to expect

'That my lord will elect
'At the time that he's gathering gold to correct,
'Not e'en shrinking from strife
'If need be, the life
'And the morals of cities where such things are rife
'As worship of idols and similar creeds,
'Each one of which breeds
'Impiety's seeds
'And always is cherishing vices and greeds?'

'How clear you express it!
'Well, well, I'll confess it,
'That though as to gold I'm compelled to possess it,
'I have for it really the greatest aversion
'Except as it helps in the heathen's conversion.'

'Then, this slave lowly-bent
'Would fain represent
'That suppose it should chance that Your Majesty went
'Nigh a thousand miles south,
'Taking thence from the mouth
'Of the Indus a line
'To the eastward, a mine
'Of wealth thou'dst unearth, which would serve, I opine,

'As a means to explain
'The extent of thy pain
'That idols in th' hearts of its owners should reign ;
'Somnath to the Tamus
'For riches is famous ;
'If we left it to heathendom, who would not blame us?'
'What a capital plot!
'Dash it all! If I'm not
'In three months from this moment encamped on the spot
'With the city in flames, or converted, I'm shot!'

Sending out a few spies
To arrange for supplies
And report on the region through which their road lies,
Mahmúd summons his men
From their homes in the glen ;
Of his wild mountain horsemen the thousands are ten,
And of foot there are more
Than three times three score
Of thousands, all warriors game to the core.
Dire a terrible band
Sweep they on through the land
As a fire o'er a plain by a western wind fanned,

Till, when three months have passed and hard by Somnath
They are resting encamped, all behind them the path
Lieth silent and still as a region where death
Hath breathed and the people have died 'neath his breath.

For a time frowned the fates;
Closed tight the town gates,
The fighting grew harder and thousands of pates
Got battered and broken
To serve as a token,
How on the occasion
Of foreign invasion
Your Hindu in fight
By dint of his dight
To his enemies' bodies can let in the light.
Things end in their season;
By means which I've reason
To believe were composed less of valour than treason,
Mahmúd forced the portals;
And, being but mortals,
Most men of the town
Knowing well they were down

Took to sea and escaped
With what goods they had scraped
Together ; though whither their courses they shaped,
Or their fate, I can't tell ;
P'raps they lived on and fell
Into luck, p'raps were drowned in the watery swell.

Now Mahmúd, as is wise,
The first thing he tries,
Is to guard the great shrine where he knows that, there lies,
Or at least has been told,
A million of gold
And jewels ; and, as he will be nicely sold
If some 'cute heathen brute
Makes away with this loot
He declares he is not going to be such a coot
As to give them a chance.
With tulwár, sabre, lance,
Setting guard to the fane,
He forbids under pain
Of death without shrieve
Or the hope of reprieve
That any the temple shall enter or leave.

Then, his body-guard corps
Posting hard by the door,
With a gallant array
Of chiefs and display
Of victorious triumph slow wending his way
All across the façade
And the long colonnade,
He tramped heavy-shod
Up the steps of the god
Of the Hindus, that none save the twice-born had trod.
'Fore the shrine, hoary-haired
Five priests to stand dared
And prostrate implored that his feet might be bared
Ere they touched that dear floor;
But great Mahmúd he swore
Good round oaths he'd do more
Than that, that he would! He would drench it with gore
Of Brahmani bulls
Alternate with pools
Of the blood of their priests. Why! They needn't, poor fools,
Imagine that he
Would such infidel be

As to let one idolatrous sinner go free,
Unless he would change his religion and give
Sure sign that he always intended to live
A true Mussulmán
And revere the Korán;
And the test he would ask
Was a very slight task,
As he knew they'd allow;
This, that each convert now
Must as sign of sincerity—slaughter a cow!

A laugh; and to goad
Their wrath on he strode
To the innermost chamber, the sacred abode
Of the great marble idol.
Ah! piteously cried all
The priests as they heard
His shout that averred
In accents deriding, their heart's blood that stirred,
'Ha! I'll dine, that I swear, off a village-pig rasher,
'If I don't shew this day why I'm named *Idol-smasher*'
Hands clasped in the air,
They begged him to spare
The idol on which they had lavished their care;

'Million dirhams of gold,
'Priceless jewels untold
'We will give thee, aye all, all the wealth that we hold,
'An ye seek not to dash—'
'Well, ere it goes smash,
'Five minutes I'll give you to hand up the cash,
'Be quick! Don't take naps,
'But sharp settle, you chaps;
'If the figure is high, I'll shew mercy—perhaps!'

'Ah! But yield us one day
'With our god while we pray
'That he grant us the limitless price that shall pay
'For his ransom.' 'My queen!
'Do I look then so green
'That you try on that game? Ha! I fancy I've been
'Much too long in the place
'Called the world. See this mace!
'Here goes! Good, it got that one straight in the face!
'Hollow 'tis too! well there!
'Now, I fancied I'd share
'Rather better by using my mace than your prayer.'

It was just as he said;

That one blow on the head

Had smashed the thin crust of the idol and shed

On the marble-paved floor

By the lac and the crore

Goldmohurs and gems that continued to pour

From the hollow stone trunk that had served as their store.

It was thus then—to date

So the epics relate—

That the priest-king and prophet, good Mahmúd the great,

Did acquire for the use of himself and his state

Quite the largest on records of loots, because he

Remained true to his faith and, refusing to be

Cajoled by the glare

Of gold's glitter to spare

An idol, to atoms to smash it did dare!

TREASURE TROVE.

TREASURE TROVE.

He had wealth and to spare,
He'd a bay Arab mare,
A house, a big band
Of servants, and land,
Broad fields, meadows, leas,
Cows, elephants, trees,
In fact, all that the mind or the body could please;
Yet of wealth never heed,
Took he, born of that breed
That thinks that expenditure counted is greed,
For an aristocrat was Meer Abdul Majeed.

His sire had, to borrow an Urdu expression
For death, executed a change of possession,
Ere his son had scarce seen
Of summers fifteen
And was, if not quite, then most nearly as green
As arcenicized peas or a tin-preserved bean;
While his servants were not
A too scrupulous lot
But gammoned the youngster with all sorts of rot

As to why *this* got lost,
And the reason *that* cost
A price that by far
Exceeded the par
Of the rate paid by purchasers in the bazaar.
Moreover they'd shew
As the older he'd grow
That the custom was clear
That a rich young Ameer
Must live in style he'd have known led too near
To ruin's dread scenes
For one of his means,
Had he not been, poor innocent, still in his teens.

The result, in one revelling round of debauches,
Feasts, cock-fights, and dinners, gay women and nautches
Entangled he lay,
Ne'er watching each day
How his property dwindled and filtered away.
When by chance he'd elect
To a trifle reflect
On the absence of cash, they said rents to collect
Were so hard ; crops were bad

And his tenants had had
Such a very poor season, they knew he'd be glad
To spare them a little.
Alas! They were kittle
And cunning deceivers,
The only receivers
Of sums that to Abdul Majeed they submitted
Should be by his kindness to ryots remitted.

At last he commences to borrow and then
He seems by each mortgaging stroke of the pen
Entangled to get
In the web of a net
[which yet
He has weaved for himself with his own hands,
Holds him only more tight;
He may struggle and fight;
All's in vain! so he finding no longer could *right*
Be relied on began giving trial to *might;*
And assembled a band
And organized grand
Dacoities and plunder-raids, till all the land
In terrible plight
Was taking to flight,
When stayed by the King who, not liking the sight,

Of his subjects decamping,
His royal foot stamping
Declared that it was most important this ramping
Dacoit should be stopped,
And so, suddenly dropped
On the robbers at home and without trial chopped
Off the heads of them all save our friend who had scraped
Through an underground passage alone and escaped.

Once out, he'd no clue
As to what he should do ;
Of friends he had none, but of foes not a few
That his flight to pursue
Or even to brue
Their hands in his life-blood were thirsting he knew.
A tattered coat blue
And a single old shoe
A dhoti, a stick, and a turban in two,
A black pair of specs for his eyes in the loo,
Two pice and no silver, weren't much of a cue
To shew him the way
Thus late in the day
After living a life so expensive and gay

To start like a lad
In the world. Yet he had
Not one shred or stitch more. It was really too bad
After all he had spent
And the loans he had lent
And the way he'd remitted his poor tenants' rent,
To wander all penniless thus to be sent!

Hard aground run, oh dear,
As he was, it was clear
From dacoit he must change to a holy fakeer.
All required was to rear
On his top-knot a tier
Of dirty black tow and with ochre to smear
His face and his rags, and the plundering meer
Was a piteous beggar, a prophet, and seer.
With devout look so quaint,
With the air of a saint,
With his head like a mop and his visage all paint,
The purest of purest; and, never a taint
Of vice in his character, never a plaint
Or reproach on him cast,
Through cities he passed
In sanctity's odour and dirt; till at last

To Srinugger he came far down in the Deccan,
Where rightly he deemed he with safety could reckon
On being unspotted by such as had seen
Him formerly while he a bandit had been.

A mile from the town
On the top of the crown
Of a ridge, with its dome all worn weather-brown
Stood a mighty big masjid, a bit tumble-down.
Allured by the charms
Of the spot, and the alms
He had cause to believe
He'd of certain receive
From the Mussulmán faithful and good who believe
To secure from their sins by their prayers a reprieve,
He sat at the gate
With intention to wait
For such patrons to come and to give him good bait
In their faith's sacred name ;
But still nobody came,
Neither beggar nor prince ; it was strange, all the same,
Nay, 'twas more, 'twas indeed a most terrible shame?
Such a mosque was deserted; whose *could* be the blame?

No muezzin nor chime
Woke the courtyard. The grime
Was deep on the flags and the lizards of slime
Crawled all over the steps. Plain it was for some time
Human foot had not trod there. What reason or rhyme
Could there be for this desolate silence? What crime
Or what deed of the devil made men no more share
In prayers and in worship at masjid so fair?

Profound meditation
And deep cogitation
Produced of the mystery no explanation,
Till at last getting tired
Of not being inspired
He went to the city forthwith and enquired.
There the people all laughed
Or declared he was daft
And must have been born of some outside-world shaft
Of man's tree. He'd *not* heard
—Was it truth he averred?—
Of the tale of the mosque! Well, that *was* most absurd!

But Abdul Majeed
Being scarcely yet freed

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From his banditti feelings was wrath now indeed,
And with as to the consequence never a heed
Would have probably made a few dusky heads bleed,
And thus put a ban
On their jeers. But a man
Snow-bearded and wrinkled, his face worn and wan
And by five score years tanned
Took him fast by the hand,
Saying, 'Thou then art stranger, my son, to this land?
'Look, seest thou the porch yonder? There without fail
'Be present at dusk and I'll tell the mosque's tale.'

As the old man had said
The fakeer with his head
Full of curious dreams, as the sun sank to bed,
Presented himself at the roughly-thatched shed
Pointed out. Here at once he was told to be seated
And regaled by the story hereafter repeated.

'Eighty years since was built
'Yon mosque with its gilt
'Swelling dome that then glowed in the sun like some spilt

'Melting furnace of gold.
'Vast, enormous, untold,
'Were the wealth and the labour that fashioned those [bold
'Marble-tracery screens, fine-carved minarets,
'The gateways, the porches, the sharp pinarets,
'In detail all perfect, yet in their connection
'Co-blending to join in one greater perfection.
''Twas not strange of its worth
'Quick the fame was spread forth
'And from east and from west and from south and from [north,
'Long cavalcades gay
'Of princes, and gray-
'Haired moulvies who hailed from far distant Cathay;
'The rich and the happy, the beggar whose way
'Was strewn with sharp thistles, the poor who to-day
'Knew not would they dine on the morrow, the fey,
'The sane, all conditions thronged thither to pray.
'Its builder was good King Háfiz-ud-deen,
'A monarch who great in all senses had been;
'Never prince was so lean
'With fasting, or keen
'On the good of his subjects, nor ever was seen
'Such a generous hater of all that was mean.
'So the country-side sighed

'And the people all cried
'To a man when they heard that this good king had died.

'The Sultan succeeding was Ashraf-ud-dowlah,
'A quarrelsome chap, always game for a row. Lah!
'The way he did fight!
'No matter if right
'And such minor points must be put out of sight;
'It was war that he wanted. Come, happen, what might,
'No challenge he'd ever refuse, day or night;
'And, may be through some sprite
'(Scarcely born of the light.)
'Victorious ever in prowess and dight
'He proved, let the battle be ever so tight.

'A neighbouring Rajah with wealth beyond measure,
'Ram Chandra by name, had incurred his displeasure.
'The immediate effect,
'As of course you'd expect,
'Was that war was declared
'And ready prepared
'For a deadly encounter, our monarch repaired

'To the town of the insolent prince who had dared
'His Highness to beard.
'Well! His Highness much feared,
'So he said, that the fellow would have to be speared
'With his wives and his children and all that revered
'Him as King.
'Such a thing,
'As a Hindu to fling
'At a Mussulmán monarch a challenge must bring
'Doom so dread on his head that heaven's houries would sing
'Their anthems most sweet
'And stirring to greet
'The fall of his kingdom, his death, his defeat.

. . .

'The armies amain
'Joined strife on a plain
'Just in front of the gates of the town. I would fain
'Describe you that horrible picture of pain,
'How the wounded men moaned, how the heaps of the slain
'Concealed all the soil, how a deluge of rain
'Of blood drenched the earth! How Ram Chandra again
'And again led the van of the charge, all in vain!

'How we fought; how our horse with cold steel mowed a lane

'Through the troops of the foe, till was death as if Cain

'In spirit was moving o'er every man's brain!

''Twas a carnage of hell!

'But enough; the town fell.

'Save Ashraf-ud-dowlah was no man could tell

'What as fruit of this moil

'And horrible toil

'Was the figure of jewels, of gold, of rich spoil

'That was taken. There bore it so long a procession

'Of elephants, camels, carts, kine, in succession

'That Ashraf-ud-dowlah at length made confession

'He felt eery at having it in his possession.

''Twas such uncounted wealth,

'He had fear that his health

'Would suffer through doubt that some robber by stealth

'Might walk it away.

''Twas a crime that would pay

'Any thief for the risk, *that* it would, any day!

'A council of state

'On a very near date

'Was called. No reporters its business relate,
'But we heard that the King fractured one member's pate,
'And another one's tongue for its ill-advised prate
'Had slit in six pieces, a well-deserved fate!

'The town and we towns-folk were soon much astounded
'At seeing the golden-domed masjid surrounded
'By a regiment of foot and a squadron of horse
'And at general orders that said that this force
'Must, dating from now,
'Guard its gates and allow
'No moulvie to enter, no faithful to bow
'Till such time as the Sultan had finished constructing
'A wonderful vault where but one path conducting
'Yet twists, twirls, and strays
'Through a mystical maze
'Tunnelled under the earth. To ensure that these ways
'Should be secret, each section was done by relays
'Of workmen, who lest they in subsequent days
'Should reveal what they knew, in the lieu of their pays
'Were free boarded in Government jails. Rumour says

'That ne'er more did they gaze
'On the sun ; but the haze
'O'er their fate I fear now that no hand will e'er raise
'And point where the corpse of each victim decays.

''Twas known at the end
'Of six months that the bend
'Of the fortieth step where the staircases tend
'Together and join was the spot that revealed
'The passage's gate, and we heard that concealed
'In the vault down below had been lodged the vast yield
'And loot of the war, and all wondered what shield
'Would be fixed for protection, and how 'twould be sealed.
'Those rumours that fly
'With their laugh and their cry
'So sure, whispered quickly that cast was the die.
'Oh, terrible fate!
'Ram Chandra, the great
'Brave foe, had been walled up alive in the gate,
'Chained fast to a post,
'That his shadowy ghost
'Might watch o'er the treasure and serve as a host

'That no bandit could pass.
'Foul the crime and, alas!
'A reckoning dear
'To follow! Strange fear
'Came o'er Ashraf-ud-dowlah. Oft folk used to hear
'Him shriek the night long with terror. He'd peer
'By day to the right, to the left, as if near
'Unseen by the world but to him ghastly clear
'Gleamed some horrible spirit incarnate to sere
'His heart and his brain.

'Studied courtiers would feign
'That they saw him unchanged, that no blot o'er his reign
'Had fallen, that still they could see but the sane
'Brave monarch of old. In vain! all in vain!
'From his throne leaping high,
'As they bent, he would cry,
'Why bow ye before me, false mockers? Am I
'Dead Ashraf-ud-dowlah? Is this shattered wreck
'The tyrant, the victor, whose hand once the neck
'Of a giant could wring?
'Ha! Ha! Is this thing,
'This trembling, this shivering body, a king?
'Accursed, accursed! See ye not how yon fiend
'Never leaves me! O, would I had died ere they weaned

'Me. Keep, O keep back! O, the fire of thy breath!
'Keep back! Let me rest for one hour ere my death!'

'Thus his life's web unwound
'Till one morning no sound
'Was heard; the King was not; they searched and him found
'As if branded with iron his brow reeking red
'On the fortieth slab of the masjid steps—dead!

'Fatal on the mosque fell
'From that hour a dread spell.
'No more, prayers were answered; no more was it well
'With worshippers. Offerings brought but a knell,
'Not a blessing. Who came from a distance returned
'To their hearths and their homes never more, but were burned
'By heaven's fire; or the hand
'Of a murderous band
'Left them dead by the way, or they sunk in the sand
'Of some treacherous ford. With the folk of our land
''Twas the same; such as went to the mosque never knew
'What it was to be prosperous more. Rich fields grew

'Unfruitful and parched; spreading trees were up-dried,

'The soil's harvests failed; horses, kine, children, died.

'And in silence of night

'Oft was seen horrid sight

'Of shades of dead monarchs re-joining the fight

'They had fought during life. Nor in glare and full light

'Of midday were queer omens wanting; folk heard

'Wild whispers and shrieks that their very souls stirred

'Yet they would not abide,

'But for treasure they tried

'Three-times thrice, and those sentinel spirits defied

'Them each time and they perished, yes, every man died

'Who bearding that pair

'Of sprites had a share

'In the trial. None now to attempt it will dare;

'Deserted's the mosque; the vast treasure lies there

'Abandoned and almost forgotten—Well, friend,

'That's all! pass the hookah; my tale's at an end.'

'A queer story,' thought Abdul Majeed, 'Now I wonder,

'Is it true? Just to think of it! crores worth of plunder

'And of ghosts only two
'To protect it! pooh, pooh!
''Tis a fairy-tale; hang it! It cannot be true!'
But hearing, on asking, it was, he revolved
The whole case in his mind for some days; then resolved
He would do nothing less
Than find some access
To the King; which he did and then thus made address:
'O monarch, thine old
'Worn slave, being told
'The tale of the mosque's buried treasure doth hold
'What he thinks is its key.
'Thou knowest that he
'Is a holy fakeer. Sire and lord, it may be
'That his sanctity boasts
'A strength that armed hosts [ghosts
'Have not. Should it chance that he scattered the
'That guard ever near
'To the vault, and left clear
'The gates for the entrance of man without fear,
'Would the great King reward him?' 'O Baba, if thou
'Forcest open that portal it is not a *thou*
'Nor yet a mere lac of rupees I will give,
'But one-half of the treasure that's there, as I live.

'Noble monarch, let ire

'Not stir thee. O sire

'Certain tools do I need which in fight 'gainst the fire

'Of sprites' breath will bear aid ;

'These are they, a spade

'And a pick all of gold, and a sword with its blade

'Too of gold set with diamonds. I pray, have them made

'Right richly ; no weapon can cope with a shade

'Lest pure it be wrought

'Many battles I've fought

'Thus armed 'gainst the spirits of darkness and brought

'Our faith's fame to each land.'

Then the King gave command

That his goldsmiths should work and next morning at hand

Should be ready the shovel and pick-axe and brand.

As he took them, the seer,

Stricken as 'twere with fear,

Cried, 'Sire of these guardian demons I hear

'Omens such I must ask one more favour ; that near

'No mortal approach, that my soul may rest clear

'From thing's earthly. By night
'Nor day let the sight
'Of man cross my eyes. All alone let me fight!
'Thus is it 'twill last;
'Till the first week is past
'Will ring out shrieks and cries. Then will silence be cast
'On the mosque. Let it reign for three weeks while I fast
'And the entrance defend
'By prayer. At its end
'On the steps senseless lie shall I. Prithee, then send
'Trusty slaves to my aid;
'Nor will find they a shade,
'But the gates flung wide open, my labours repaid.'

So 'twas done. For seven days heard were horridest shrieks,
Then moans, then was silence. At close of three weeks
Went the King all in state.
It is sad to relate
That he found no fakeer there; and as to the gate
Of the vault it was shut
And still walled up. But,

Where were shovel and pick-axe and sword? 'Twas a nut

They could none of them crack.

True, they found at the back

A skeleton jackal tied tight in a sack;

That was all, nothing more! Not a clue, trace, or track!

'Poor man,' sighed the King,

'What a terrible thing!

'To be turned to a jackal! Why *will* these fiends bring

'Death on all who'd unclose

'This vault? I suppose

'They have taken the tools to the devil; who knows?'

That's the last that we read

Of poor Abdul Majeed;

For, of course, you and I, hearer, never could heed

When one said, 'twould appear

That this holy fakeer

Was considerably more of a rogue than a seer;

And been had he so bold

As to steal the tools' gold

And the King and his Councillors actually sold

By tying a jack in a sack there to shriek

Till death shut its mouth at the end of a week ;
And the reason to peer
He'd wished nobody near
Was to have, not his soul, but his way left him clear.

Was this not a remark most extremely ill-bred
Quite deservedly costing its author his head?

THE IDOL OF KALINGA.

THE IDOL OF KALINGA.

In a grove all alone
On a nice little throne
Lived a bright little idol of nice white stone ;
Of its race 'twas the pick ;
It was six inches thick,
It was two feet high and its throne was of brick ;
Its ears they were two ; strung its neck was with charms ;
It had eyes just three and at least six arms ;
One face, four legs, plus a placid expression,
What more could you want for a prayer or confession ?

Viseshar and Madho were Brahmans by caste
And they loved each other and friends were fast
With a love that they knew for their lives would last ;
And they bowed as they aught
To the idol and brought
Each day yellow flowers with the cakes they'd been taught
Pleased the hearts of the gods, and they never were caught

Save in piousest state.
Now tricksy old Fate
By one of his whimsical freaks the same date
Gave Viseṣhar a daughter and Madho a son
And the two happy parents just happened to run
The one 'gainst the other at setting of sun,
As they came on their way
To the idol to pray
And lowly and humbly and gratefully say
Their thanks for the babes he had given that day.

Among Hindus most queer
Is a custom too dear
Under Englishmen's rule e'en to soon disappear,
'Tis that none of them wait
Till from small unto great
Grow their babes and of manhood attain to the state,
But marry them early and give them a mate
Ere the simplest of words they can articulate.
So of course think would you
When it chanced that these two
Sworn friends, so affectionate, loving, and true,
Met to thank such a nice little god as they *ought ter*,
The one for a son, t'other one for a daughter,

It should enter their pate
'Twas a ruling of fate
That at just the same hour neither early nor late
Brought them both to this green.
What else could it mean
Save that Madho's young son had of certainty been
Unto earth that day sped
The girl baby to wed?
So the parents linked hands and thus solemnly said;

'Our god, witness bear
'On this day as we swear,
'Be the course of our lives traced through gloom, be it fair;
'Grow we poor, grow we rich; be our raven black hair
'Oiled with attar of roses, or grey-worn with care;
'Let our paths winding nigh
'Or far apart lie;
'Do we laugh with prosperity's laugh, does the cry
'Of sorrow aye sadden our lips: do we live,
'Do we perish; we swear, be thou witness, to give,
'I my son, I my daughter, and here clasping hands
'We betroth them and pledge them in marital bands.'

And a crow on a tree in the grove, as he saw
Them swearing, by way of amen chuckled caw.

Now that little black crow as he cawed there the trees on,
I wonder had he in his mind any reason
For making that noise. True, a bird very 'cute your
Black crow always is. P'raps he looked in the future ;
P'raps there did espy
With a far-reaching eye
Such thing 'twas no wonder he uttered that cry ;
P'raps he knew that though people may swear, yet their oath all
The same they may break ; though they make a betrothal
They don't always stick to it. P'raps, wizard's cap on,
He saw—well, no matter ; I'll tell what *did* happen.

In the year of great dearth
Twelve months from the birth
Of his child went Viseshar forth over the earth,
And did trade in such style
That he made a vast pile,
For somehow no shop-man in all the square mile

Can lie as he learnt to do, when worth his while.
So of course cent for cent
Wherever he went
He profited, doubling all capital spent.

When at length he went back
To his village, a lac
Was his income a year, and he'd with him a sack
O'erflowing with gold
And jewels untold,
While wonderful garments and clothes he'd unfold
That costly and dear
In far off Cashmere
Had taken in weaving full many a year.
When folk found how he rolled
In wealth, they all told
Him they'd longed for his coming. But he, he was cold,
—As who would not be, if he'd got all that gold ?—
And *so* said 'How d'you do ?'
That it meant, 'Who are you,
'You boors, that I'd care for your welcome a shoe ?
'I've crores and, you beggars, you're not worth a sou !'

Meantime just as poor
As ever before
Was Madho. Such land
As he had, his own hand
Ploughed and sowed, and the grain it bore winnowed [and fanned
Yet he never forget
That marital knot
They had tied long ago on the little grass plot
With the idol of stone
On its nice little throne
To listen to what they were saying alone.
Still he dawdled a lot
Ere the courage he got
To mention the subject. 'Dear me, *I'll* be shot,'
Cried Viseshar, 'What *is* this ineffable rot?
'Your wits are benighted!
'Her life to be blighted,
'To the son of a ploughman my only child plighted!
'But, remember, please, where—'
'No, I shan't, sir, so there!
'And get out of my house too this instant. You dare
'Say such things to me. Well, well, well, I declare!'
Poor Madho! 'Twas rough;
'Twas a cruel rebuff.

Not content with denial; *that* was not enough,
He had kicked him right out of his house, his old friend!
Too bad! In mankind his belief was at end!
Still it was not the thing
To let a man fling
His oath to the four winds of heaven. He'd bring
A suit, that he would! in the court of the King.

The monarch was holy and just and he fixed
One whole day for decision of matter so mixed,
And an usher did send
To bid to attend
Viseshar in order the case to defend,
With all papers *in re*
And witnesses he
Would like to produce in support of his plea.
Madho, when that he heard,
Thought, 'This is most absurd!
'Proof, witnesses, papers! It never occurred
'To me once, they'd be wanted; and here I've averred
'In my plaint that the idol alone that day heard
'Our oaths and our plight.
'Oh bother! I might
'Have at least had a chance to establish my right

'By suborning a witness or two. What a cool,
'Stupid blunder I've made. Well, I *have* been a fool!'

Each morning in vain
And each evening again
He revolved all the contract and case in his brain;
And 'twas in dire dismay
At the dawn of the day
Of the trial he desolate wended his way
To that grove where alone
On its dear little throne
Sat that bright little idol of nice white stone.
He'd a cake done brown
And he popped it down
On the throne and he girded a yellow crown
Of the sacredest flowers round the brow of the god
And he told his tale. Did the idol nod,
Or was it his fancy? He looked; it was odd,
But the idol had bent,
He was certain. He leant
And gazed and then cried: 'Ah! Thou surely hast [meant
'That nod as a cue!
'Thou knowest 'tis true,
'Every word I have uttered. Say, what can I do

'Lest in ruin I groan.
'Thou wast witness alone
'And—' 'Stop,' cried that nice little idol of stone,
'Come listen to me; for the false shall atone!
'I'll be your support;
'I'll bear witness in court,
'And walk there myself too; the manner, n' importe!
'That's just what you mustn't enquire into. I
'Can't move, if you see me. So be good and try
'Not to watch! 'Tis not fun;
'If you glance back, you're done;
'Not a single step will I take further, nor one
'Word to utter will dare.
'Now, march; and take care;
'Not one look to the back, eyes in front, sir, beware!'

Half frightened, half pleased, Madho started still doubting
Was he dreaming or had the god really been spouting.
Clump, clamp, went the legs of the idol! a clatter
On stones and on road! Pit-a-pat, pit-a-patter!
Oho! on the way
Then he'd started; right gay
Strutted Madho ahead sure of winning the day.

Grove and road pretty fast
And a common were passed,
Then a field or two, all of them *hard*; but at last
Came a damp sort of fen.
Stamp, stump, stamp, and then
No more clattering foot-falls,—oh dear, why are men
So absurd as to think
That the only sure link
'Twixt knowledge and fact are their senses? The clink
Of the feet being silent, three times on the brink
Madho halting would fain
Take a look, yet again
Marched on, but the fourth was too much; under pain
Of his case being cast
Glanced he back, and, aghast,
Saw that nice little idol fall prostrate and grassed
As he turned him around.
Not a breath, not a sound,
Not a movement! It lay like a corpse on the ground,
And with it lay dead the one help he had found.

Poor fellow! Dismayed,
How he begged and he prayed,
And kneeling and standing and lying essayed

To move the stone heart of the idol. But no!
It stirred not, but stuck there refusing to go!
'Well, faded's the rose;
'I must quit, I suppose?
'But stop; an idea! Why, my goodness, who knows
'If I tell the good King
'Of this very strange thing
'And somehow or other I manage to bring
'Him here to the spot,
'Then perhaps I'll have got
'The best of the case after all. I'll be shot
'If through hope I'm not pale!
'Ah! To tell him my tale
'And show him the idol here, how can it fail
'To secure me the trick? 'Tis as good as an ace
'Of trumps up my sleeve; and to fancy the face
'Of Viseshar! I'll choke!
'Well, well, may I be broke,
'If this is not indeed a most excellent joke!'
And attempting to sing,
With a skip and a spring
He trotted away to the court of the King.

The monarch was good, he was just and devout!
In silence he listened the whole tale out;
Then said, 'By Vishnoo,
'If this story is true,
'That idol is lying there still; now do you
'Point the way with your paw!'
Straight they went and there saw
That dear little idol alone on the raw,
Damp grass. Quoth the monarch, 'According to law
'I give judgment for Madho. Moreover I order
'The state architect promptly to mark out a border
'And draw plans pretty spry
'For a temple that I
'Will build. 'Tis a shame such an idol should lie
'With his head unprotected from weather and sky.'

So the girl she was wed, and there stands to this day
That temple as proof of each line of this lay.

MIND *vs.* MATTER.

MIND *vs.* MATTER.

THEY were jackals; no meal
Had they had for a de'il
Of a time and, poor things, were beginning to feel
Very empty inside. They had hunted the jheel
But the geese were too wily, too wary the teal ;
To stifle the craves
Of hunger, poor knaves,
They had scratched and had turned up the earth of the graves,
And had smelt through the bushes and poked in the caves ;
Yet fortune unkind
Their cries would not mind,
And to famishing skeleton looks remained blind,
So never one morsel to eat did they find.

'Twas a crisis among them ; the young and the strong
Were eyeing the weak and the old; they had wrong
Wicked thoughts in their heads, as if may be ere long—
Well, you know what I mean ; but still jackals must live,

And if young jackals take what old jackals won't give,

Who to blame them can run?

And I speak not in fun

For with jackals like men it is, first number one.

Loud and bitter with greed

Grew the growlings. To feed

Or die was the question. From speech unto deed

Was no very long stride

In such case. Then why bide

And dawdle inactive till all the pack died?

To action!—Just then a great elephant passed;

Quoth a youngster as eyes on the monster he cast,

'What a great hulking brute! And we folk for the last

'Three days have had nought but continuous fast!

'Here, I'm worn to a streak

'And as wasted and weak

'As a cat; and that lump there so cursedly sleek!

'Faugh! How I should love it to stand up and shriek

'On his corpse. Well, you toothless old doddering sneak,'

To a veteran jackal, 'Don't shiver, but speak!

'How to kill him? 'Tis *I* of course don't care a fig. It
'Might make *you* live longer. D'you catch on, d'you twig it?'

'Quite, quite; I believe,
'Young imp, by this eve
'Twill go hardly with some if there's not a reprieve;
'Unlimited teeth and no trace of a shrieve?
'Have I caught on? So, so!
'Well, sir, do you know,
'A plan has just struck me. I don't wish to crow
'Or gas or romance,
'But it has got a chance
'Of success—Now then please, do not look so askance
'I'm no ox of the stall,
'So stand off! And, hark, all
'My brethren here, old, young, great, and small,
'We are hearing unpleasantly loud hunger's call,
'And I fancy I'm not going any too tall
'When I mention that imminent mutters a squall
'That mayn't end in a spree.
'Well, didn't most of you see
'That elephant pass? Now then, will you agree
'To fast one day longer and trust all to me?

'He was fat, he was luscious ; O jacks, would not he
'Make a meal? Let us try if our meal he can't be !'

They approved ; the old fellow would never forsake 'em,
And if elephants were to be taken, to take 'em
He was, was that jack, 'bout as 'cute as they make 'em.

Tall to his shoulder and strong in his trunk
With his green little eyes in his great head sunk
The elephant strayed
In the midst of his glade,
As the light of the sunset was yielding to shade ;
When a jackal stepped up and obeisance low made.
Cried the elephant, 'Jee,
'Then who may *you* be,
'And what may you want coming here, sir, to me ?
'Speak quickly or else I've a mind, for a spree,
'To shy you up there with my trunk on that tree,
'And that tree is no very low tree, as you see.'

Bent double like shears,
He tilted his ears
Did that jackal, and wept he great crocodile's tears,
And shuddered with terror and shivered with fears ;

Then quoth : ‘ O great elephant, willingly slay
‘ Thy servant, but first hear his message, I pray.
‘ Though the least of all beasts, I'm deputed this day
‘ A kingdom to lay
‘ At thy feet and to say
‘ That assembled in order their homage to pay
‘ To the new-chosen king
‘ Waiteth each living thing
‘ That abideth or roameth within the great ring
‘ Of this wide-spreading jungle. Thou knowest the way
‘ Of tigers and lions and all beasts of prey ;
‘ Flesh ever they seek,
‘ And the victimized weak
‘ Are quite unprotected and only can squeak
‘ And die and be eaten, whenever the freak
‘ Of killing them strikes some one stronger. 'Tis might,
‘ Strength, coarse brutal strength, and wild passion for fight
‘ Are in vogue in this forest, lord king, and not right.

‘ Matters getting too hot,
‘ To unravel the knot
‘ We beasts we convened a great council and got

'All sorts and conditions to meet at one spot.
'The tigress was there
'With her cubs. From his lair
'Came the lion. In one corner sat a great pair
'Of panthers. Wolves, deer, leopards, sámbhur, a mare,
'Jackals squealing as usual, two bears and a hare,
'Sheep, cows, bison, porcupines, all come to share
'In assembly so swell.
'It passed off as well
'As could be expected. The boar, 'tis true, fell
'A bit foul of the cubs of the tigress and gashed
'One's side with his tusks, and so got his head smashed
'For his pains, and a silly stag made a diversion
'By publishing loudly some cruel aspersion
'That a panther had eaten a deer. The poor lion,
'Some one said, for a long time two sheep kept his eye on,
'Which gave us the sack
'Over night and went back
'To their homes, so of course spread of lies was a pack
'Hinting p'raps they'd been eaten. But can ever convention
'Be assembled at which some such tales as I mention
'Aren't bruited and cried?

'Let us set them aside;

'Twas as a clear as the sun that the tale-bearers lied.

'Well, a week thus did slide,

'Till on cries of divide

'And a motion of closure the porcupine tried

'To obstruct, the house voted and came to decision

'That the statutes and laws were in need of revision;

'That the time had now passed

'When the big should play fast

'And loose with the small; that the die had been cast

'And chosen must be

'Some monarch whom we

'Should all serve; last that I as a herald should flee

'And braving thy frown

'At thy feet should lay down.

'Of this realm of wide jungle the sceptre and crown.

'Wilt accept them?' Of course he would; only too glad;

Was sorry besides that the small folk had had

So much trouble so long and had been in such bad

Condition; was sure

It would be so no more;

His rule would effect quite a radical cure.

Three times thrice on the ground
Fell prostrate that hound
Of a jackal professing each time he was bound
That they all would grow fat through his grace. Might he add
That, although it perchance was a stupid old fad,
They'd consulted the pundits about coronation
And been told that of certainty such operation
Must be done on the morrow at dawn? Would his sire
Reflect that the length they'd to go would require
That at once they withdrew?
'Twould be dark, it was true,
But the jackal could see without light and well knew
All the road. If behind
The great king was so kind
As to follow his lead, by the morning he'd find
Himself closely embraced
By his subjects. Such haste
And a journey at night were not much to the taste
Of the monarch. His eyes
Preferred light in the skies;
But who hesitates when there's a crown as the prize?
So he followed the jack and believed all his lies.

* * * * * * * * *

On the edge of a deep sticky quagmire there sat
All the jackals that once had been lean. They were fat
And as sleek as a quail,
And as merry and hale,
And they laughed at an old jackal ending a tale :
'Well, you see, jacks, he never had been by this road
'And knew nothing about this fine quagmire. I'm blowed,
'Nigh with laughter I burst
'When he slipped. How he cursed
'When he found himself stuck there ! Old stupid, at first
'He thought it was accident. Didn't he trumpet
'When I told him I'd meant it and now he must lump it,
'And asked would it do any good if I kissed him
'Or gave him the end of my tail to assist him !
'Well, he's dead and a deal
'We must thank him ; I feel
'That I never before have had half such a meal.
'Was it lies I told ? No ! We his subjects are around him ;
'And embracing him closely we are now, confound him !'

VULTUR IN PARTIBUS.

VULTUR IN PARTIBUS.

A VULTURE was he;
From his hollow tree,
Half blind with age he could scarcely see
Whether you held up fingers three
Or five or one. For a centuree
He'd lived, and there is not a chimpanzee
Has tail half as long as he'd pedigree.
Time had been
When he skimmed the green
Killing and maiming in cruel spleen,
Bleeding a rabbit for glee,
For a spree
Slaying a sheep or a bumble-bee.
But age had changed him; on bended knee
He prayed to his idols religiouslee;
Who now need flee?
None could saintlier be
Than the paragon vulture that grown was he.

The birds they loved him and many a nest
They built on the branches around; they could rest

Quite safe from danger and free from care
While the good old vulture sat guarding there.
With him in his lair
They might mate and pair
And rear their youngsters; no robber would dare
E'en from a distance to at them stare
With covetous looks,
As they sat in their nooks
To list as the vulture recited from books
Terrible tales about bad wicked cooks
Or sweet little stories of pigeons and rooks.
And they searched with pains
For tit-bits and grains
Of rice and of barley, and out of the gains
Of whatever they caught
A share ever brought
To the vulture for dinner and, just as they ought,
To repay him his kindness in every way sought.

Now it happened that nigh
Came a cat passing by
And the hollow abode in the tree did espy.
'What *is* that I see,
'By jingo,' thought she,

'But a typical lair for a pussy like me?

'With those nests all around on the boughs of the tree,

'Why, it's lodging for nothing and board *ad lib* free.

'Here goes!' With a grin

And a leap she was in

'Hullo!' cried the vulture, 'Who's here? What a din!

'Say who you are sharp or, you scoundrel, I'll pin

'You clean through the heart and will rip up your skin

'Like ribbons. That's flat!'

'Pundit, please I'm a cat—'

'A cat! What! And come here! The ghost of my hat,

'What on earth made you be such a stupid as that?

'Die, you brute, you accursed—'

'Pundit, do listen first;

'I'm not a bad cat, I'm a good one; I thirst

'For knowledge, you know,

'Not blood. Long ago

'I did wicked things; but the older I grow

'More and more through those sins am I plunged into woe.

'In those days it was nice,

'So I thought, and real spice

"To kill and to eat up the dear little mice
Or at times I preferred
—'How I then was absurd!—
'To catch for my dinner a twittering bird.
'But that's over; my eyes
'Are open, and sighs
'Burst from me while backward my memory flies.
'And with moan and with groan,
'As I seek to atone,
'Long years have I wandered this jungle alone
'That some priest meet I may
'Who can shew me the way
'For the wrongs I have wrought a fit penance to pay.
'Pundit, all folk have told
'Me that ever they hold
'Thee to be such a priest and thus I've been so bold
'As to beg that my name on the list be enrolled
'Of that fortunate few
'Whom thy teachings imbue
'With the love of whatever is honest and true.
'Wilt grant this?' The vulture, poor bird, was but mortal
And of promptings of vanity could not deport all

In spite of his age.
Who to ravage and rage
Had loved, to be known far and wide as a sage ;
He thus to be famed,
Who all goodness had shamed
And the weak had most cruelly murdered and maimed
In his youth's rabid day,
The great vulture of prey,
To be chosen to sinners to point out the way !
What praise, real praise ! Then, can you and I wonder
That his head became turned, that he fell in the blunder
Of thinking the cat spoke the truth, that she came
For prayers not for prey, not through hunger but shame ?

Of course he would teach her ; would do what he could
To shew that strait path by which ever the good
Make their way from the depths of the horrible wood
Of sin to the fountains of truth. In his youth
He'd been like the cat, in fact worse ; never sleuth
Hound had ravaged like he did ; had left off that habit ;
When he saw a stray lamb, or a rat, or a rabbit,
Now never attacked or attempted to nab it ;

Perhaps it was strange
All should know what a change
Had come over him; still it but shewed what a range
Had goodness and truth; and he hoped this example
Would serve to the dear reformed cat as a sample
Of how she should walk;
Would be glad by his talk
To shew how to make her heart whiter than chalk
And atone for her sins; and so on. The cat
Spotting sharp the old bird was as blind as a bat
Resolved to learn right
And turned pupil. Till night
She would lie there concealed drinking draughts of delight
From the lips, so said she,
Of the vulture. When he
Went to bed, she climbed out on the boughs of the tree
And caught little dickies where'er she could get 'em.
And bringing them back to the hole, bad cat, eat 'em.

It was not so long ere as mad as a hatter
All the birds got and kicked up the deuce of a clatter
Cried the sparrow, 'Hullo!
'Where's my wife?' And the blow

Of her loss nearly killed him ; and here was a go,
That wisest of birdies, the black-coated crow,
Couldn't find her dear baby ; she'd searched high and low,
But it hadn't turned up ; please did any dick know
Where to look for the sweet ?
And the green parroqueet
With her twittering ever-unceasing tweet, tweet,
Where was she ? And the pigeon, the mina, the starling,
And lastly the bright little bulbul, the darling
And pet of the tree,
Where were they ? Changed was glee
Into fright ; and the owl said it wisest would be
If the birds all would meet the next morning at three
To discuss solemnlee
And to try hard to see
What causes gave rise to their loss. Sagest he,
What better could other birds do but agree ?

Meantime mistress pussy perceived that a crisis
Had come ; at such time it undoubtedly wise is
To decamp and not wait to see what the reprise is
Will follow your raid. Thus, the moment 'twas dark
She slid down the tree with her claws in the bark

And fled. When for council at dawn by the lark
The trumpet was blown,
You'd never have known
That a pussy had lived in the hole, but had flown!

What a terrible hubbub those dicky birds made!
Like good members of parliament each one delayed
Public business to hear himself speak. The whole glade
With the noise rang again:
From tom-tit to crane
All talked, save alone that with eyes full of pain
The owl preserved silence. At last when a lull
Came, he opened his mouth and enquired why a mull
All were anxious to make of the matter. The birch
Was what they deserved; go, at once let them search
First the tree, then the grove. The dear friends who were missing
—Why wouldn't those two stupid doves stop their [kissing
E'en on this, council day?—
If by some beast of prey
They'd been killed, then of course somewhere near-abouts lay
Proofs and signs of their death such as feathers or feet
Which the brutes who had slain them weren't able to eat.

To all sides went the birds in their search. The two doves

Who had just been reproved for indulging their loves,

Hopped into the hole from the light. What a fright,

Timid darlings, they got at the terrible sight!

Feathers, bones,——but beware!

For that vulture's still there

As if nothing had happened! Foul brute! With his lair

Reeking red with the signs of his sins, could he dare

Complacently blinking to breathe heaven's air!

Horrid! Pell-mell they go

At full pace to the crow

And tell him their tale. 'What a hypocrite, oh!

'What a beast, all blood's taint!

'To have thought him a saint,

'And so holy and good; and to find that he ain't.

''Tis too bad!' they all cry—

''Twas too bad,' too say I,

For the vulture, poor innocent fowl, had to die

For the crimes of the cat. The birds banded together

And pulled him to pieces, bones, skin, flesh, and feather!

And the moral is this. Shut your door to a stranger,
Or you're bound to be let in for trouble and danger ;
If there's profit, he'll take it ; if blame, you may bet, it
Is assuredly host and not guest who will get it ;
The house than its company better may be, it
Will only be *held* and be what people *see* it.

FINIS.

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